LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From FATHER K. CARROLL, Catholic Mission, Ijebu Igbo.

. . . We continue to get plenty of work for our woodcarvers. We do not do any work for Europeans unless they have a special interest in African art, but we do work for museums and buildings in Africa. At present we have just finished carved panels and pillars for the office of Honourable Awolowo, Premier of the Western Region of Nigeria. Some of the panels for this work were mahogany, up to twelve feet in length. We have also finished massive carved doors for a large Parish Church in Ibadan. One double door, nine feet wide by eight feet six high, and two and a half inches thick, is the most massive work we have undertaken yet. We have also a contract for twelve posts with traditional subjects for Bernard Fagg, surveyor of Antiquities, Nigeria. We have also orders for two large double doors, for the entrances of two new Churches. It looks, therefore, as if we will be able to preserve the traditional Yoruba skill, and be able to keep the carvers working on modern jobs. We are encouraging one of the carvers, an educated young man, for whose apprenticeship as a carver we paid, to take on jobs himself and gradually build up an independent industry.

I have been looking all over Western Yoruba country for some one who will compose traditional style music and poetry for Church use or for Christian drama, but have not been able to succeed in getting anything really useful. It is easier to get such people away from the large cities, but the trouble is that their music and dialect is not very suitable outside their own district. However, one of the African Yoruba nuns, has learned an Ekiti Yoruba Nativity play from recordings and is teaching her school-children.

I went to Porto Novo in Dahomey, where the Yorubas sing at the Cathedral Mass every third Sunday and recorded their music. *Sekere* (gourd with a mesh of beads), drums and *ogidigbo* (using metal bands which are plucked with the thumb) are used. The music is rather slow and there is little dance rhythm in it. It is the more serious type of religious music used by the Yorubas, but not the most serious type. It was composed by a highly educated French African, who went to Ketu for a suitable type of music. It is popular with the Yorubas in the Cathedral. My own criticism would be that it does not have the complete concord of melody and verbal tonality that would be found in any music sung by the pagans. The composer would have done better if he had actually worked out the Christian words with the pagan woman who taught him the original melody.

I gave a series of illustrated talks on the development of Yoruba pagan music for Christian uses on the Nigerian Broadcasting Service, which seemed to be well received. Judging by the comments I received from many people who listened to the series, the radio is a much more useful medium for spreading ideas than the written word. My main thesis was to show that serious Yoruba religious music was quite distinct from the strongly rhythmic music commonly heard. Fela Sowande, Director of the Musical section of the N.B.C., was quite struck by the solemn music sung by the women whom I brought to make recordings in the studio.

From Dr. M. D. W. JEFFREYS, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

. . . The following information as to how drums were played in Nubia some two hundred and fifty years ago may be of interest. Ralf Herzog, in his article "Ethnographical Notes on the Sudan in an early travellers' account" that appeared in *Sudan Notes and Records* Vol. XXXVIII. 1957, pp. 119-129, writes: "Theodor Krump, who was born about 1660 in Aichach in Bavaria (Germany), was a member of the Catholic Franciscan Order . . . he was attached to a deputation of missionaries who in 1700 left Cairo for Gondar, at that time the residence of the Abyssinian soveriegn . . ." Krump was left behind at Sennar where he kept a diary. From it he published at Augsberg in 1710 a book of 501 pages. Of this book so very few copies are known that even C. Beccari in his book of 14 vols. *Rerum Aethiopicarum Scriptores*, Rome 1914, does not mention him.

Krump, according to Herzog wrote: "Afterwards we continued our way with the greatest jubilation and rejoicing and beating of drums, five pairs of which the merchants of the kings of Sennar, Geni and Dongola had brought with them.

"The manner of beating these drums is as follows: after the manner of the cavalry (in Europe) they tie them to a camel on which a Moor is seated using a big drum stick in his right hand and a much smaller one in his left, who continuously beats the drum three or four times with the big stick before beating once with the small one."

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From Dr. M. D. W. JEFFREYS, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

. . . In the Portuguese quarterly, *Garcia de Orta* Vol. 6. No. 2. for 1958 published in Lisbon, there is, dealing with African music, an article that may be of interest to your readers, namely "Contribuição para o estudo dos instrumentos musicais dos indígenas de Moçambique—A *chitata*, por Norberto Santos Júnior. p.347."

The ordinary native "piano" commonly called a *miramba* is called here a *chitata* or a *bira* or a *ringa*.

The author notes that the reason, that these instruments are not used in an orchestra or collectively, is that the sounds they produce are rather faint and of short duration hence the use of this type of instrument by Negroes in their long journeys along the roads.

The author draws attention to the following interesting points, namely the thread connecting the bridge to the resonance box, which corresponds with the sound-post in violins, and the strips of bamboo bark, fixed with wax to the bars of the *sanse*, which . . . on vibrating against the lower face of the respective bar, make a sound like the humming of an insect's wings, caused by sympathetic vibration. The Negro's sharp ear and his musical sensitiveness makes him capable of taking, from these instruments with bars, harmonic combinations which we hear with a certain pleasure.

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From Professor WILLARD RHODES, Columbia University, United States of America.

. . . You may be interested in a report of work in progress and some impressions I have received during the past three months in Southern Rhodesia.

As a Fulbright Research Scholar I have established my headquarters at the National Museum in Bulawayo where I have been studying the function of music in an African urban society. From a sociological point of view it has been most interesting, but from the standpoint of music it has been disappointing. The invasion of American jazz, jive and rock and roll has all but displaced the traditional native music in the urban centers. The African Administration of the City of Bulawayo, under the able direction of Dr. Hugh Ashton, has provided a number of beer parks in the township locations where Africans congregate on Saturdays and Sundays for recreation. Conversation, social intercourse and beer drinking are the principal activities and one is struck by the paucity of music. In some of the parks a tribal group will take over a pavilion, make it private by hanging a burlap curtain around the sides and furnish a program of native dances to those persons who patronize the group by paying an augmented price for their beer. But these demonstrations of traditional music and dance are limited to only a few of the beer parks.

One of the most interesting examples of contemporary African music is to be found in the *Makwaia* songs. These modern songs, varying in style and quality with the musicality of the composer-leader, continue the basic techniques of African composition. The songs of this genre which I have recorded as sung by Gorigori's choir of sixteen male voices are in the form of a rather free, seemingly improvised recitative sung by the composer-leader, Gorigori of Belingwe, against a three-voice accompaniment by the choir. Each section of the choir, tenor, baritone and bass, is given its short melodic line by Gorigori and these parts are combined in a continuous, repetitive polyphonic sound. The combination of these independently moving melodic lines results in a strange and beautiful polyphony that can only be compared with the organum and early polyphonic experiments of the middle ages. Though the disciplined, precise and polished performance of these *Makwaia* songs, all carefully rehearsed under the firm direction of Gorigori, and the introduction of a humming technique suggest European influence via the music of the Missions, Radio and Phonograph records, their structure, style, technique of composition and manner

of singing remain basically African. They are not to be confused with the contemporary harmonized African songs that have been patterned after the gospel hymns of the missions with their ubiquitous and innocuous Tonic, Dominant, Sub-Dominant harmony. I have not had time to translate and notate this material but I believe that a detailed study of these songs will yield considerable information.

In the Central beer hall in Bulawayo, a three-piece dance band of a saxophone, amplified guitar and bass viol, provides jive music for dancing every afternoon between three and five o'clock. In the townships dance plazas have been designated as "Jive Klubs" and there on Saturday and Sunday afternoon heterogenous jazz ensembles play for the dancers. By European and American standards the African jazz is but a pallid imitation of American models, copied by ear from phonograph records. The popularity of this "new music" is beyond estimate. One asks for an explanation of the mass acceptance of jazz by the urban Africans. In the readiness with which they embrace and imitate European culture we have a partial answer. The prestige value which the African affixes to all things European is as evident in music and dance as in clothes, furniture and other elements of material culture. Alan Merriam has made the pertinent observation that the process of acculturation in music is most active when there are common elements in the musics of the two impinging cultures. This being so, it is not surprising that the detribalised, urban African neglects his traditional music in favour of the prestige-laden European-American jazz for the basic techniques of rock and roll have their origin in traditional African music. The ground bass, the ostinato figure, and the free improvisatory solo melody with its endless variations which is embroidered over the rhythmic-melodic warp and woof of the composition are elements as essential to the current American rock and roll and its African imitations as to much of the traditional African music.

One wonders what this invasion of American popular music will do to African music. Some Africans believe that it is only a temporary phase of acculturation through which they are passing and that sooner or later the roots of their indigenous culture, after a dormant period, will awaken and send forth new shoots and flowers. Maybe, but one must recognize the fact that a new generation of urban-born Africans who have experienced only African urban culture has broken or at least weakened the link with the past. They know no other music than African jive, the missionary hymns, and the South African choruses emanating from Lovedale, which they are taught by Tonic Sol Fa notation in the schools.

In December I attended "The First African Music Festival" presented by the Cultural Syndicate in Stodart Hall, Salisbury. The following statement outlining the scope and function of the festival appeared in the programme:—

> "The All African Music Festival due to open in the Stodart Hall—Harare on December 12 this year will be yet another corner stone in the Cultural history of the African people of the Federation. Intended, as it is, only to show to the world the inert[1] talent our people possess and the extent to which they have adapted themselves to their ever-changing situation, it will also avail the average man, European or African, the chance to see the most unique African Traditional Music and dances and will enable him to note the interpretation the African gives to modern Jazz, Calypso and Classical Music. Plays written, produced and directed by the Africans themselves will be a remarkable feature of the Festival".

The failure of the Festival to achieve these lofty goals was a disappointment not only to those Europeans who are interested in the musical culture of the Africans but also to the African themselves. The only traditional music on the programme was that which accompanied the Shangani dancers, who, according to the review in the African Daily News of December 16, 1959, "stole the show". The balance of the programme was devoted to an endless list of vocal and instrumental ensembles patterned after American prototypes and performing indescribably bad imitations of American popular music. The names of these ensembles indicate the type of music they performed—"Golden Rhythm Crooners", "Twelve Bar Blues Band", "Mashonaland Melodians", "Four Black Crows", "Cool Fours," etc., ad infinitum.

The Staff reporter of the African Daily News in the aforementioned review expressed the opinion of the audience in the following paragraph:—

> "Backgrounded by the painting of a typical African village, the robust and rugged performers (Shangani dancers) wriggled, stomped and somersaulted on the stage, giving the audience the impression that although jazz had gripped the minds of the urban African, there was more beauty in the tribal dancing of the African people. It expresses the inner feelings of the people who perform."

The month of January I spent in Mtoko District where I camped at the Nyamakosi kraal of the Budya, a sub-tribe of Shona-speaking people. Though my work was somewhat retarded by the heavy rains I was able to record one hundred items, including story songs, game songs, *Makwaia* and *Jerusarima* dance songs, grinding and threshing songs. The death of the elderly mother of the headman of Chasewa kraal provided an opportunity to observe the native funeral rites and record the funeral dance songs and the *mutupo* songs which were sung by the visiting clans. In the recording of instrumental music I was

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less fortunate, my collection to date being limited to several flute melodies, a few pieces played on the *Makube* and the *Mbira* music which accompanied the funeral dirges. I was made aware of the seasonal and functional character of Shona music. The work in the fields, still a hoe-culture despite the occasional use of plows and oxen, involves both men and women from early morning to sun-down and after a long day of hard labour in the hot sun there is little incentive for music and dance.

I am told that the social life of the harvest season and winter months is rich with music.

At the Mtemwa Leprosy Hospital at Mtoko I recorded thirty-four items ranging from the story songs told and sung by the teenagers of the school to the exciting narrative songs by a group of Korekore from Sipolilo District, Mt. Darwin. The texts of these songs expressing the personal feelings and experience of the lepers await translation and analysis. The singers' whole-hearted enthusiasm and complete absorption that marked the rendition of this music served as a cathartic release from the grim reality of their physical condition.

The work I have reported on I regard as preliminary and exploratory to more intensive and extensive collecting and research to follow. I need to extend my studies among the urban Africans in Bulawayo and I plan to record more widely among the Shona.

Your unpublished manuscript on Shona Music, based on your field work in 1932, which you so kindly loaned me has been of invaluable help. I regret that this work is not in published form so that it could be available to other students of African music. With your permission I should like to keep the manuscript longer so that I may compare my material with that on which you reported twenty-seven years ago.

With my best wishes for the continuing work of the African Music Society and the International Library of African Music and warm personal regards . . ."

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From The Rev. Father Ch. v. RŸTHOVEN W. F., Lubushi Seminary, P.O. Kasama, Northern Rhodesia.

. . . We go on here recording (in our free time between lessons) old African folklore. I made nice copies of Rhodesian *Chilimba* music (Bemba) with singing, and the more I listen the more I get convinced of the solidity and pureness of their music and the more I deplore that our Educational System has so little time allotted for the folklore, so that so called "educated" boys have *no culture at all* any more, losing their African music and poetry, and unable to absorb good European things . . .

People of the bush come to sing in my "studio". It is wonderful. As for Church music, I do my best to get as many African melodies as possible in the Church. But I am not a master in their language and have not yet found the real African Church composer, mastering his language and music in such a way that he produces Church compositions. Our great difficulty is to compose together the poetry with the melody. And this is also the handicap for more European musicians, appreciating fully what the people are doing. But I noticed that even 'Mr. X' falls short in this. (I visited him again a few months ago with my recordings and he was "*too*" delighted with the Church music we made here with the boys, making the same mistake in his compositions in African language by disregarding the tonal accent of the African language!)

Still a long way to go . . . But am very pleased that you go on with your fine work which may encourage these people to keep to their own art and not to "pollute" it with rubbish from outside.